

USING FACEBOOK AND MOODLE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: 1 + 1 = 3?

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ABSTRACT

Owing to the subject nature of marketing research, majority marketing students perceive the subject is difficult and boring when comparing with other marketing subjects such as consumer behavior, service marketing, and integrated marketing communications. The study attempts to explore whether the additional usage of Facebook facilitates the associate degree students to learn more effectively or not. The research findings are positive and the marketing students prefer using Facebook to supplement Moodle for enriching their learning experiences. Furthermore, students are found to acquire better understanding of marketing research concepts and applications. In general, they welcome the usage of Facebook for teaching and learning activities.

KEYWORDS: Facebook, Moodle, Marketing Research, Blended Learning, and Hong Kong

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, blended learning has been commonly adopted in higher education sector for facilitating business students to learn effectively inside and outside classrooms. The popularity of blended learning may not necessary lead to changes in teaching and learning pedagogy in teaching and learning of business subjects. Business students may demand for a user-friendly teaching and learning platform and seek for enriched learning experiences. However, majority of business educators in Hong Kong are having conservative attitudes towards using new pedagogy for carrying out teaching and learning activities. The usage of Blackboard, Moodle and Facebook, Twitter for teaching and learning activities are limited in higher education sector in Hong Kong. Many educators mainly use the eLearning platform such as Blackboard and Moodle for downloading notes, delivering news or making urgent announcement to students. The study attempts to explore whether Facebook is able to supplement Moodle for motivating more marketing students to learn marketing research outside the classroom.

Facebook is considered as the largest online social-network in the world. Statistics reported by Statisticbrain.com (January 2014) that total number of monthly active Facebook users has reached 1,310,000,000 by 1 January 2014. The average time spent on Facebook per visit is 18 minutes and 48% Facebook users aged 18-34 year olds check Facebook when they wake up. As a result, the utility of Facebook may enable educators to motivate students to learn more actively.

To success in academic endeavors, it is necessary for students to feel connected and experience a sense of belonging (Mahoney 2006) A recent survey (Cengage Learning 2007) reported that 50% of the educators or respondents perceived the social networking sites would change the learning behavior of students. A research study (Hunt, Atkin, and Krishnan, 2012) indicated that Facebook features embrace the interactivity element which allows users to design interpersonal communication freely. In addition, a recent study in Hong Kong (Hodgson and Kwok, 2014) has attempted to examine the required generic skills in 21st century for prepare future young business graduates by 4 main categories of skills, the study has highlighted the “Tools of working” which cover requirements of research and related skills.

A past study in Hong Kong (Kwok and Chan, 2012) indicated that marketing students found discussions and sharing in Moodle was useful for their study although this was an optional online learning activity. Research studies related to Facebook usage for educational purpose is limited (Karl and Peluchette 2011). On the other hand, educators in business faculty may encounter difficulties to engage students' interest and attention to study both inside and outside when teaching a challenging subject like marketing research. Consequently, it is interesting to discover the perception of Hong Kong students in the higher education sector towards the usage of Facebook for their learning and communication activities.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Research Objective

This study attempts to discover whether the usage of additional eLearning platform of Facebook to supplement Moodle could enhance overall learning experiences and interest of marketing students to learn their core subject of marketing research during the final semester of their study.

Target Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were the final year full-time marketing students studying a self-financed associate degree programme in Hong Kong. The students were familiar with the usage of blended learning setting. Generally speaking, students were required to download their teaching plans, lecture notes, assignment information, and latest course materials of their study directly from Moodle. On the other hand, both the lecturer and the students of the study were new to use Facebook to supplement teaching and learning activities of marketing research.

Facebook Usage in Hong Kong

Facebook statistics by country reported by Socialbaker.com (2013) that Facebook penetration rate is about 55% covering about 3,787,960 Facebook users in the Hong Kong. Hong Kong is ranked in the position of 44 in terms of total numbers of Facebook users by country. Similar to other countries, majority of the Facebook users are young people. The statistics republished by Social baker also indicated that the largest age group belongs to 25-34 (about 1.24 millions) which is closely followed by the age group of 18-24. This implies that the popularity of Facebook among Hong Kong young people and potential influences of Facebook on these connected young generation.

Nowadays, many students in Hong Kong use mobile service to access to Facebook. The mobile subscriber penetration rate has reached 229% by December 2012. The web environment endows rich teaching resources such as real business cases, factual information, and YouTube video clips that enable business students to develop ability to identify evant information for solving problem (Hodgson and Kwok (2013)). The high penetration rate has provided a platform for students to access Facebook through their mobile device or mobile phone anytime and anywhere.

Facebook – “Happy Learning”

The Moodle eLearning system and Facebook of “Happy Learning” were set up for the students at the beginning of the semester in January 2012. There were about one hundred students studying the marketing research course. Moodle was an official eLearning system and all students used their own passwords to access to the Moodle. Students were expected to access Moodle on regular basis.

Facebook was newly set up to supplement Moodle for facilitating students to learn the marketing research. All students studying marketing research were encouraged to make their personal requests on voluntary basis to the subject

lecturer for joining the “Happy Learning” Facebook. “Happy Learning” was given as the name for the Facebook for teaching marketing research because the learning experiences of the subject tend to be bored and challenging. Giving such name was aimed to revitalize students’ perception towards this challenging subject.

Although Facebook was set up to supplement teaching and learning of marketing research activities, all official notices teaching plan, lecturer notes, assignment briefs, and important news were delivered in Moodle and Facebook were used to deliver friendly reminders to students. Besides sending out friendly reminders, “Happy Learning” Facebook was used to delivery YouTube videos, explanations of some core marketing concepts, sending birthday “hello”, and “like” messages to individual students by the subject lecturer. On the other hand, the “Happy Learning” Facebook also provided an additional online channel for the students to interact with other classmates and the subject lecturer outside classroom.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

Pluralistic research [9] was adopted for the study which covered three stages. Firstly, observation of students’ learning behavior in Moodle was conducted throughout the semester. Moodle was used as an official eLearning system for studying the subject of marketing research. Secondary, an anonymous online survey (n=42) was conducted in April 2012 then it was followed by personal telephone interviews in July 2012. All respondents’ participated in the studies were on voluntary basis. Both quantitative and qualitative research studies allowed the researcher of the current study to acquire rich and useful data to understand students’ perception and expectations of using Facebook to supplement Moodle for facilitating and engaging them to learn the subject of marketing research.

Anonymous online survey was conducted when course of marketing research was completed. It was delivered to all concerned students in the Facebook of “Happy Learning” during revision week in April 2012. All students studying marketing research were invited to join the anonymous online survey on voluntary basis. However, owing to the impacts of examination revision and deadlines of other assignments, the overall responses rate was about 40% and 42 completed questionnaires were received in due course. The 42 completed questionnaires covered 60% female respondents and 40% male respondents.

FINDINGS

Observation of Student Behavior in Moodle

Moodle was an official eLearning system for the students to download their course materials and all important information relating to the subject of marketing research. The students were expected to access to the Moodle on regular basis for obtaining latest information from the subject lecturer. Table 1 gives a summary of items given in the Moodle as the total number of page views done by the students at the end of the semester. Table 1 shows a summary of page views’ statistics regarding some selected items in the Moodle. The statistics showed that students tend to pay attention to those items relating to assessment mainly.

Table 1: Page Views by Students in Moodle – Selected Items (N=100)

Selected Items from Moodle	Indicative Contents of the Selected Item	No. of Page View
News Announcement by the Subject Lecturer	Course News	4,899
Individual Assignment w/Rubrics	Assessment Related	564
Assignment Submission Template	Assessment Related	629
Group Project Brief w/Rubrics	Assessment Related	736

Table 1: Contd.,

Online Real-life example-Survey Report	Assessment Related	214
eForum Disc.(Lecturer & Students)*	Assessment Related	210
Guest Talk – Marketing Research (optional)	Assessment Related	54

*all discussions relating to individual assignment

Table 1 shows that the class of marketing students seemed to be active ones in terms of their online behavior of page viewing in the Moodle. Nevertheless, similar to other eLearning platform, students' attention was mainly on the assessment related items and news announcement delivered by the subject lecturer. The industry talk was delivered by an experienced professional marketer and it was an optional for the students to join. The intended learning outcomes of the guest talk was to enrich students' real-life exposures, and acquire better understanding of the concept applications in real-life settings. Table 1 also indicates that this item received rather low rate in page view of having 54 visits. This implies that students mainly focused their attention in their assessment related readings when accessing to the Moodle.

Anonymous Online Survey – Facebook “Happy Learning” (n=42)

Anonymous online survey was conducted in mid-April of 2012 and all marketing students who completed the marketing research course were invited to join the online survey through the Facebook of “Happy Learning”. The objective of the online survey was to explore the student preferences regarding the usage of Facebook when comparing to Moodle and email for enhancing learning and communication with the subject lecturer and classmates. A short brief of the research objective was given to all students through the Facebook “Happy Learning”. The students were given about 2 months to complete the online survey. 42 useful responses were received from the 100 marketing students and key findings are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Online Behavior of Students – Facebook and Moodle

No. of Hours Spending on the Followings: (N=42)	Every Week
No. of hours spending on Facebook	36% < 3 hours 33% 3-7 hours 19% 8-12 hours 7% over 20 hours 5% 13-20 hours
No. of visits to “Happy Learning” Facebook	62% 1-3 visits 33% visit once 3% 4-6 visit 2% 7 visits or above
No. of visits to Moodle	41% 1-3 visits 24% 4-6 visits 22% 7 visits or above 12% once 1% did not reply

Table 2 reported that all the students visited Facebook every week. Majority of them (64%) spent at least 3 hours per week in Facebook. Some of the students (7%) spent over 20 hours per week in Facebook. With regard to number of visits to the “Happy Learning” Facebook and Moodle, the finding showed that all students visited the both website at least once a week. It is interesting to discover that 65% of the students indicated that they visited both Happy Learning and Moodle around 1-6 visits per week.

Overall, the above findings seem to show positive indicators in terms of students' learning behavior regarding the usage of Facebook to supplement Moodle. In addition to the above findings of students' online behavior, 27 opinion statements with 5-point Likert Scale were developed to explore the students' perception regarding the usage of Facebook for teaching and learning activities. Some highlights of findings relating to Moodle and Facebook are given in following Figure 1 to 3:

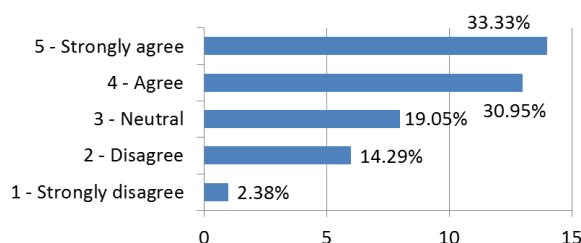


Figure 1: Compare with Moodle, I Prefer Using Facebook to Receive Information from My Lecture (N=42, Mean=3.8)

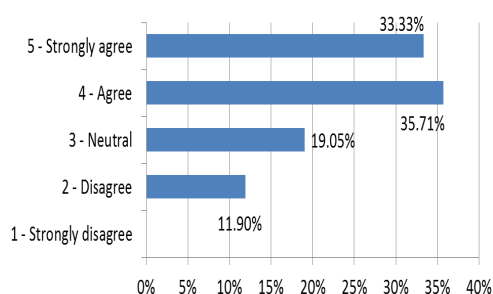


Figure 2: Compare with Moodle I Prefer Using Facebook to Contact My Lecturer (N=42, Mean=3.9)

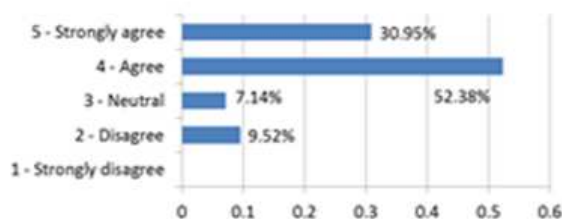


Figure 3: Compare with Moodle I Prefer Using Facebook to Interact With My Lecturer N=42, Mean=4.1)

When comparing Moodle with Facebook, the findings in terms of mean values (mean 3.8, 3.9 and 4.1) clearly indicated that students have strong preference of using Facebook than Moodle for receiving information and communications with the lecturer. Furthermore, Table 3 also provides additional evidence about the students' overall preference of using Facebook for learning and communications purpose.

Table 3: Student Perception of Using Facebook for Teaching and Learning Purposes (N=42)

Opinion Statements with 5-Point Likert Scale	Mean
Overall, I prefer using Facebook to communicate with my lecturer.	3.9
Overall, I pay attention to my lecturer's postings.	3.8
Overall, I prefer using Facebook to interact with my lecturer.	4.0
Overall, I prefer using Facebook to interact socially with my classmates.	4.3
Overall, I enjoy using Facebook to contact my classmates.	4.3
Overall, I enjoy reading my classmates' postings.	4.1
Overall, Facebook makes our classmates getting closer to each other.	4.2

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

To conclude, the key findings show that the additional usage of Facebook to supplement Moodle helps marketing students to enrich their learning experiences. The proposed idea of 1+1=3 seems to be feasible, workable, and welcome by majority of the marketing students. However, owing to limited resources in terms of time and budget, the researcher of the current study would like to indicate limitations of the study like sampling bias, subjective interpretations by the researcher, and sampling errors may exist in the research findings. Having said that, the findings may provide some positive indicators and stimulate more future studies on Facebook or attention to enhance students' learning experiences in higher education in particular for some challenging business subjects like marketing research.

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